

WAR ON VIRTUE

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Bill Donohue, *War on Virtue: How the Ruling Class Is Killing the American Dream* (Sophia Institute Press, 2023)

This book is about the making of the American dream and attempts to thwart it by the ruling class.

Having studied why some people are a success, as measured by educational and economic achievement, I came to the conclusion that cultural factors are the key to understanding success. Virtue matters.

People do not do well in school or in the workplace because they are lucky, or even smart. They come out on top because they possess the three most important virtues that make for success: self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance. Having these attributes does not guarantee success, but not having them guarantees failure. This is as true for athletes as it is pianists. I call them the “vital virtues.”

Without self-discipline, the kinds of sacrifices that it takes to measure up isn't going to happen. In fact, those who cannot, or will not, exercise self-control are destined to fail in school and in the workplace.

The Catholic Church has long understood the role that virtue plays in character formation. That is why Catholic schools do so well, even in neighborhoods where public school students fail. In fact, no institution has done more for those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale to succeed than the Catholic Church.

Taking responsibility for oneself is critical to success. Blaming others for one's failures may be psychologically

comforting, but it is a dead end. Even when an individual, or an entire racial or ethnic group, has clearly been mistreated, it makes no sense to wallow in misery. Victimhood is one of the most destructive characteristics anyone can possess—it breeds a sense of impotence.

High achievers have all experienced failure, but unlike many others, they find a way to better themselves. They persevere. They have grit. Basketball superstar Michael Jordan was a model of grit. “If you’re trying to achieve, there will be roadblocks. I’ve had them; everybody has had them. But obstacles don’t have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.”

There are four demographic groups that embody the vital virtues, par excellence: Asians, Jews, Mormons and Nigerians.

These groups succeed in school and in the workplace because they exercise self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance. The source of the vital virtues is the same in every case: they all come from intact two-parent families. Those who come from one-parent families can succeed, but their chances are slim compared to those who come from homes where there is a father and a mother.

The social science evidence on this is overwhelming. Why, then, does the ruling class—the elites who run our institutions—not do more to nurture the vital virtues? Worse, why are they increasingly doing everything they can to undermine them?

No group has suffered more at the hands of the ruling class than African Americans. It is not white supremacists whom they need to fear—it is the mostly white, well-educated elites who claim to be on their side. They are the real menace. They are the ones who promote policies that subvert the inculcation of the vital virtues.

Well-educated white people who claim to be on the side of blacks—but are in fact their real-life enemy—are not new.

George Fitzhugh was America's first sociologist. He is the author of the 1854 book *Sociology of the South*. Like many of those on the Left today, he railed against what he perceived to be the exploitative nature of capitalism. He was also a strong proponent of slavery.

Why would a “progressive” support slavery? He said blacks were not capable of competing with white people in a capitalist economy, and it was therefore preferable for them to remain as slaves.

In his work “The Universal Law of Slavery,” written in 1850, Fitzhugh explained his view that “the Negro is but a grown up child and must be governed as a child, not as a lunatic or criminal. The master occupies toward him the place of parent or guardian.” He noted that slavery had a positive effect. “The negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world.” Everything was taken care of for them.

Fitzhugh said something that the white “allies” of blacks would never say today, though their thinking and their behavior toward them suggests a similar outlook.

“The negro is improvident [and] would become an insufferable burden to society. Society has a right to prevent this, and can only do so by subjecting him to domestic slavery. In the last place, the negro is inferior to the white race, and living in their midst, they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chaos of free competition. Gradual but certain extermination would be their fate.”

Fitzhugh was not an anomaly. During the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Richard T. Ely was one of the most prominent leaders in the social-justice crusade; he was considered sympathetic to blacks. What he said

was similar to what Fitzhugh said. "Negroes, are for the most part grownup children, and should be treated as such."

Fast forward to 1988. That is when the astute social scientist, Charles Murray, wrote a classic essay wherein he predicted the "coming of the custodial democracy." His prediction has come true. He said "what is now a more or less hidden liberal condescension toward blacks in general, and toward the black underclass in particular, will have worked its way into a new consensus."

Murray maintained that liberal intellectuals and policy makers would come to terms with their view that "inner-city blacks are really quite different from you and me, and the rules that apply to us cannot be applied to them." Therefore the best that can be done is to generously supply them with "medical care, food, housing, and other social services—much as we do for American Indians who live on reservations." This is the face of custodial democracy, treating inner-city blacks as "wards of the state."

Matters have only gotten worse. Now we have an array of reparation policies and equity programs designed to "help" blacks. In essence, the ruling class has given up on blacks.

If the elites in government, education, law, the media, the entertainment industry, non-profit advocacy sector, the big corporations and the foundations truly believed that black people were just as capable of exercising personal responsibility, self-discipline and perseverance as white people, they would never give up on them.

The dirty little progressive secret—the sentiment that they don't want to state publicly—is their conviction that blacks can't make it on their own. This explains why they are always looking to implement new government policies, initiatives that smack of racism.

For example, the thinking behind critical race theory is that

blacks can't move forward unless white people move backwards. As one of the chief gurus of this pernicious idea says, Ibram X. Kendi, "The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination."

Kendi is the darling of the corporate, government and education elite. Not only does he promote racist ideas—in the name of combating racism—he sends a message of victimhood to blacks. There is no surer way to promote failure than to convince people that they are incapable of self-improvement, yet this is what the ruling class does every day.

If the elites were serious about treating blacks as equals, they would do what they can to repair the damage that the welfare state has done. It was the welfare programs of the 1960s—pushed by the ruling class—that did more to undermine the black family than any other factor, including racism and discrimination.

Instead of strengthening marriage, the ruling class is responsible for weakening it. Now every conceivable social arrangement qualifies as marriage. After a clear majority of the people in the very liberal state of California voted in 2008 not to recognize same-sex marriage, who rushed into the courts to overturn the expressed will of the people? Two of the most elite lawyers in the nation—one a Republican and the other a Democrat.

When Theodore B. Olson and David Boies (who had squared off against each other in the 2000 presidential election debacle) were granted a hearing in a San Francisco court in 2010, the voters in thirty states had already voted 30-0 to affirm legal marriage as the union between a man and a woman. But that didn't stop the elite duo from neutering the voice of the people.

The schools should be promoting the vital virtues, but instead

they often work to undermine them. Students who are given the most homework do the best in school, and no group does more homework than Asians. Their parents see to that. Students raised in one-parent families do the least homework; they also do the least well in school.

Students cannot learn unless there is order in the classroom, but in many schools it is difficult to maintain order. This is a function of the teacher unions and the courts. By putting a quota—a cap—on the number of students from any given racial or ethnic group that can be disciplined, the elites who make these policies are ensuring that those at the bottom stay there.

A key prerequisite for academic success—indeed success in almost any area of life—is civility. But when self-discipline breaks down, the incidence of criminal behavior increases. When personal responsibility is eschewed, crime follows. When young men, in particular, fail to develop the virtue of perseverance, attempts at rehabilitation invariably fail—resulting in more crime. When all three virtues are under attack, it is nearly impossible to achieve civility.

Following some ugly incidents between the police and black men in 2020, crime started to get out of control. Instead of holding everyone accountable—rioters as well as cops—the elites promoted policies that went easy on criminals and all but disarmed the cops. The “defund the police” movement—which blacks opposed—did nothing to ensure justice, but it did much to guarantee incivility.

It is a tribute to the patriotism of most Americans that they still believe in the goodness of the nation. It is a tribute to their commitment to the vital virtue of perseverance that they refuse to give up on the prospect of realizing the American dream. This is especially true of minorities who refuse to give up, despite the obstacles deliberately erected by the ruling class.

The time is ripe for leaders who embrace the vital virtues to bring about a cultural renewal. No institution is better suited to do that than the Catholic Church. Its moral voice was hurt by the clergy abuse scandal, but that is behind us. We need the clergy to become more vocal, and we need the laity to be supportive of their efforts. Making the American dream a reality for everyone depends on it.